

If I Only Die Once-A Hicctrud Fanfic

by Crane of the Poplars

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Summary: *SPOILERS FOR HTTY2* Astrid chooses to investigate what seems to be Drago Bludfist's heir plotting to continue the "Dragon Army" scheme, but as chief, Hiccup can't go. Hiccstrud fluff.

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1. Leaving

Hiccup's POV

"Hiccup, I have to," Astrid pleaded as she brushed hair off his face.

"I am not letting you go alone. Please." Hiccup replied.

"No. This is a solo quest. Berk is not going to risk losing another chief." She pulled him in for a quick kiss, one that was soft but passionate, and mounted on Stormfly. "I'll come back. I promise." She patted Stormfly on the head, and they took off.

"I can't risk losing you," Hiccup thought. He watched as the two slowly faded into the horizon, no more than a speck. Tears poured down his eyes. Even as chief, he had no say in what Astrid did. She was the leader of the two of them. So when she overheard that Drago's heir was planning to carry on the whole "Dragon Army" thing, she was determined to get some inside information. Hiccup insisted on going with her, but everyone, even Valka, made him stay. After all, as chief, he had more responsibilities than time for adventures. He looked up as the speck disappeared.

"Good luck Milady. Stay safe..." He wiped his eyes and mounted Toothless. Toothless took flight, and hovered over the cliff for a minute, as if Hiccup forgot to do something. Taking one last look, Hiccup gestured to Toothless to take off.

"Promise that you'll come back," he whispered. "I love you."
Toothless then soared back towards Berk, in the ever-so darkening sky.

2. The Cave

Astrid's POV

The sun was beginning to set as she finally got a glimpse of the mountain.

"Careful, Stormfly," she whispered. "We don't want to be seen." Quietly, Stormfly flew in and landed on the side of the mountain, just a few feet from the yearning open mouth of the cave. The petted Stormfly on her head: "Good girl," Astrid cooed. "Stay here."

Tiptoeing towards the cave, Astrid's heart started beating out of her chest. No, not a happy and nervous beat, the one that was always there whenever Hiccup hugged or kissed her. No. This was the beat that was there the day when Toothless (and Hiccup, but Toothless mostly) had there one-on-one with Drago. There seemed to be a eerie light coming from the darkness of the cave. Stormfly peeked over Astrid's shoulder.

"No Stormfly," she whispered. "I'm sorry, but I have to go alone." A twinge of guilt tugged at her heart. First, she had to turn Hiccup, the love of her life, away from her quest, and now her dragon too? It was for the best, yes, but she still couldn't feel so guilty. "I'm sorry," she whispered as she kissed her dragon on the nose. "I, ll -"

It was then when a husky voice spoke from inside the cave: "We are here to discuss the ever so dangerous terror of Berk." Astrid leaned closer to the mouth of the cave, listening. "I want two of you to go to Berk, and slay the scum who rides the Night Fury. I want his head!" He roared. "And yes, bring me the head of that dragon too." Astrid's heart stopped. "Hiccup!" she whispered.

Immediately she turned away, ready to mount Stormfly and fly back in order to warn the village. Instead of her dragon, she slammed into heavy armor- dragon skin armor- and looked up at a masked face with a thick black beard.

"Hello beautiful," the voice cooed. "Let me show you around." Before she had time to grab her axe, much less run, Astrid felt a sharp pain in her back and surrendered to a world of darkness.

3. The Dream

Hiccup's POV

Hiccup woke up in the middle of the night. Cold sweat ran down his cheeks. "No!" he thought. "No!" The nightmare had been too much for him.

_Astrid was lying cold and lifeless in a dark cave as masked Vikings were hurling stones and whips at her. Her eyes were not all the way

closed, and her mouth was moving, speaking inaudible whispers. Drago Bludvist looked on, his cold eyes showing no sign of pity, just pride. Stormfly was nowhere to be seen. Astrid's weak whimpers and cries for help were meaningless: the sound of the roaring and cheering witnesses were drowning out her small, desperate criesâ€¦|_

Tears started pouring down Hiccup's face. The Elder always said that dreams may be omens for the future. In fact, many people believed that they were actually prophecies, foretelling the fates and fortunes the future held. Hiccup hoped that this was not one of those dream. "Just a nightmare..." He thought. "Not real...". But it seemed real-so real-and it caused Hiccup to hop out of his bed and tiptoe towards the door. He had to tell Valka.

"Mom?" he asked as he pushed open the door to his mother's room.

Valka groaned. "What Hiccup? It's very late."

"I'm going to go find Astrid."

Upon hearing this, Valka immediately shot out of her bed and hurried over to her son. She grabbed him by the shoulders and looked him fiercely in the eye. "Why?" she asked.

"She's in danger." Hiccup replied.

Valka frowned. "Hiccup, you know what she said about..."

" She's DYING!" Hiccup yelled. "If I don't go, I'll lose her._"

Valka eyes clouded with concern. "How could you possibly know?"

Hiccup sniffed, holding back tears. "A...dream." he stuttered. "She was being tortured by Drago..." He immediately snapped back into shape. "I'm going. Now." He headed towards the door before getting stopped by his mother.

"No." Valka shook her head. "Not in the dead of night. You have no idea of the horrors that are out there. No."

Hiccup opened his mouth, but clamped it shut, as if searching for the right words. He finally said, "I'm the chief," with a tone of confidence.

Valka frowned. "I'm your mother," she argued.

Tears started streaming down Hiccup's cheeks. "Pleaseâ€¦|" he begged. "This dream...felt so...real. Astrid will...die...if I don't go. Please."

Valka's expression softened. Hiccup knew that his mother knew all about losing someone she loved. Hiccup did too. He refused to allow Astrid to die so soon after Stoick.

Valka smiled. "Okay Hiccup, you may go. However, you must take the other Dragon Riders with you and not leave Berk until sunup."

Hiccup smiled wearily. "But—" He closed his mouth. He knew it was no use to argue anymore. His mother had already granted permission to go. "Thanks mom. I'll get some sleep."

He then left the room, tiptoed back to his bedroom, and crawled back into bed. He could not sleep. "We're coming to save you, M'lady. Don't you worry."

4. The Beginning

Hiccup's POV

Early the next morning, Hiccup shot out of bed, put on armor, and sprinted out the door.

"Breakfast?" Valka yelled as Hiccup dashed down the front steps of Haddock House. "You'll get hungry sooner or later. And take something for Astrid."

Hiccup stopped abruptly and dashed back up to the door, taking the steps two by two. Once he was inside, he grabbed a cloth bag, tossed in a couple of rolls from the platter Valka had set up, and filled his skin canteen with water. Valka smiled at her son. As Hiccup turned to head out the door, he waved goodbye.

"Bye mom!" He exclaimed as he began to shut the door.

"Good luck, Hiccup. Stay safe," Valka waved goodbye.

Hiccup looked back at Haddock House for a final time before heading towards Toothless in order to fly to the houses of his fellow Dragon Riders. Valka's expression was hard to read. Her eyes glittered with pride and confidence, but her lips were pressed in a line that only showed concern. Hiccup wondered if she approved of his choice. After all, she let him go. Toothless ran -more like taking flying leaps - to Snoutlout's door and Hiccup knocked loudly but politely. The door opened and Snoutlout peeked out.

"What?" he asked. "Another adventure? Where to?"

"Get Hookfang," Hiccup instructed. "We're going to save Astrid."

Snoutlout looked confused. "Wait why?"

Hiccup grabbed Snoutlout by the arm. "She's in trouble. We're going now."

"But chief—" Snoutlout looked around. "Isn't it a bit—" However, he stopped short after receiving a glare from Hiccup.

Hiccup cleared his throat. "We are going. Now."

Snoutlout grinned. "Will Ruffnut come?"

"All of us Dragonriders," Hiccup replied. He was about to continue but Snoutlout was already out the door and readying Hookfang.

"To make things faster, I'm going to get the twins," Hiccup decided. "Snotlout, can you get Fishlegs to meet us in the square?"

"But I want to get my Ruffnut," Snotlout complained.

Hiccup frowned but agreed. After mounting Toothless again, he made his way to Fishleg's house. Hiccup knocks on the door, only to be greeted by a Fishlegs whose mouth was still stuffed with breakfast.

"Whuâ€|?" asked Fishlegs, muffled.

"Get Meatlug. We have to help Astrid."

"But Breakfastâ€|"said Fishlegs, disappointed, as he tried hard to swallow.

"I have some in my bag," replied Hiccup. "We have to go. Now."

Fishlegs stumbled out the door and walked to the barn behind his house where Meatlug was kept. He appeared a couple minutes later, riding on Meatlug who was nodding enthusiastically.

"What's taking Snotlout so long?" Hiccup wondered aloud. Fishlegs shrugged. It was then when a winded Snotlout came running towards Hiccup.

"Theyâ€|" Snotlout took a breath. "Ruffnut...didn't believe me. She wants to see you first, Hiccup," he said angrily.

"Well then," Hiccup grumbled. "I knew you should've gotten Fishlegs. Every second we waste means more danger toâ€|" he could not continue. He did not want to cry again. Not in front of his friends. Snotlout and Fishlegs seemed to understand and both looked down.

"Wait here. I'll get them," Hiccup and Toothless took off. Toothless landed in front of the twin's house. Their door was still open and Snotlout's dragon was still sitting by the porch, probably a hostage. Ruffnut was frowning.

"Guysâ€|" Hiccup sighed as he dismounted. "Snotlout wasn't lying. Astrid's in danger."

"See? I told you!" Tuffnut scoffed.

"I can _never ever ever_ trust Snotlout!" argued his sister. "But since Hiccup's here, I guess we should go."

Tuffnut was still frowning. "How do you know, Hiccup?"

"Dream. Drago's men were...torturing herâ€|"

"Drago again? That dorkface? Can I be the one to kill him?" Tuffnut asked.

"Astrid is our first priority."

Tuffnut looked disappointed, and looked around for his sister. "Ruffnut? _Can_ you hurry up? Don't be a slowpoke!" he

complained.

"I'm not a slowpoke!" Ruffnut came out from the stables riding Barf. Blech's neck bent, allowing Tuffnut to get on.

"What are we going to do about Hookfang?" Tuffnut asked.

"I'll walk him. You guys fly out to the square." With that, the twins take off. "Come on, Hookfang," Hiccup beckoned. "Follow us." The dragon obeyed immediately, and flew up in a whoosh after Toothless and Hiccup. They landed in the middle of the square in an unintentional flourish. The villagers looked up and gasped.

"Hiccup!" they exclaimed. A few even ran towards Toothless. "Where are you off to?"

Snotlout mounted Hookfang as soon as he landed behind Toothless. The Dragonriders formed a semicircular ring around Toothless and waited.

"We're going to save Astrid," Hiccup said with a faraway look in his eyes. "You just wait and see." The group of dragons then soared away into the early morning light.

5. The Journey

Hiccup's POV

The four dragons sailed smoothly above the clouds, their riders quiet. Hiccup and Toothless took the lead. With hopeful but tired eyes, he scanned the horizon for signs of the mountain cave.

"Hey! are you sure you know where it is?" Tuffnut asked.

"You said you had breakfast," Fishlegs added.

Hiccup turned around. "Yes. I'm pretty sure we're going the right way."

"Breakfast?" Fishlegs asked again.

"Breakfast is not the most important thing right now," Hiccup snapped. He was not usually like this with his friends. He felt sort of bad once he saw Fishleg's disappointed expression. "It's just Astrid," he thought. He knew he usually was like this when people he cared about were in danger. Why, Astrid and Valka were the only two people he would listen to days after Stoick died. Hiccup turned around and gave Fishlegs an apologetic smile.

"What if there's another monster dragon?" Ruffnut asked. "What do we do?"

"Don't worry babe," cooed Snotlout. "I'll protect you."

Ruffnut whacked him in the head with the body of her spear so that he nearly fell off Hookfang. "Hey!" he complained.

"That's what you get if you say that," hissed Ruffnut. "Do it again

and I'll knock you off your dragon."

"Whatever babe," but Snotlout stopped short after Ruffnut gave the death stare.

Fishlegs looked over towards Ruffnut. "So.." he asked. "That means you like me?"

"Ugh," Ruffnut groaned. Her brother laughed.

"Too bad Eretâ€|" Tuffnut started but was cut short after getting slapped by Ruffnut.

"You shut up," she snapped.

At the head of the team, Hiccup smiled, weakly. Yes, the Dragonriders can be a bit argumentative, but he was glad he wasn't alone. Toothless threw his head back, as is he felt something.

"Toothless?" he asked.

Behind him, Ruffnut was still arguing with Snotlout. Toothless's eyes narrowed.

"Shh. I think we're close." Hiccup whispered, gesturing to the group. They quieted down, but Ruffnut was still scowling. Soon, the mountain cave appeared in the distance.

"That's it?" complained Tuffnut. "I was expectingâ€|"

"Shh!" Hiccup snapped. "Stay quiet. Let's hope the cave's not sealed."

The dragons quietly descended down towards the mountain. Stormfly was nowhere in sight. Hiccup's heart sank. As the dragons landed on the rocky ledges, a blood piercing, desperate cry screamed through a crack in the stone.

"Astridâ€|" Hiccup whispered.

6. The Tourture

I don't know if this chapter should be rater T for slight violence, please leave a review on your discretion**of this.**

* * *

><p>Astrid's POV<p>

When Astrid woke up, she had no idea where she was. Her vision was hazy, and she tasted blood. When her eyes cleared up, she realized she was lying in a heap of wood that bit into her bare arms like needles. However, it felt wet and greasy, as if it had been oiled. She tried to move, but a stinging pain in her back stopped her. Also, her legs were tied together.

"Where am I?" she thought. It was then she remembered. She was in Drago's cave.

"What is his _NAME_!" Drago's voice bellowed.

"What?" she asked, her voice barely a whisper. A rock the size of her fist then hit her in the forehead and blurred her vision a little. She felt a searing pain that shot into her brain and she felt the warm blood streak down her cheek. She gritted her teeth, forcing herself not to cry in pain. "What do they want?" she thought. "Whose name?"

"Answer me!" Drago demanded as another rock hit Astrid, this time hitting her arm. Tears streamed down her cheeks, mixing with the blood as it hit the wood.

"Whose name do you want?" she asked, choking out the words.

Another rock. This time it was her cheek. She whimpered in pain as blood streamed from the cut. She wanted more than anything for Hiccup to be here, next to her. No, she wanted to be back on Berk. She wanted to be with her family, and her friends. Not here.

"The Dragon Master's name!" Drago demanded, placing his bullhook inches from Astrid's nose. She closed her eyes. Should she give it away?

"No!" she snapped, suddenly sounding strong. "Never."

"Then you will feel pain!" Drago roared and gestured to his henchmen. They pulled out whips laced with stone and dragon teeth. Astrid panicked. She shuddered as the men came closer.

"Go!" Drago ordered.

The pain was beyond description. Whips and stones came tearing at her body. Each strike caused blood to stain the wood even more, and her tunic ripped from the back. She held on in order to protect her privacy, clutching the tunic so hard that her knuckles turned white.

"If you like dying like this, then stay silent!" Drago laughed. "I'll sit here and watch."

Astrid cried out when a whip hit the same spot twice. Drago laughed again.

"You can just tell me a name, or anything!" Drago cooed. "I can let you live."

"No!" Astrid started sobbing. She has never cried at the face of the enemy, but his was too much. Far too much.

"Pain it is then!" Drago smiled an evil, menacing smile. He stepped even closer to Astrid. "Unless!"

Astrid looked away. She would do anything to protect her friends and especially, Hiccup. More whips and stones hit her, but she was so overwhelmed with pain that all of this felt like nothing. "If I die!" she thought, "At least I died protecting Hiccup." Suddenly, a realization hit her. If she did die here, it would be in vain. She studied the hole at the top of the mountain, used as a chimney, and remembered her and Hiccup's first encounter with Eret. She smiled,

weakly. She knew that there was no stopping Drago, so if he really did kill her here, all he would do was continue his hunt. Letting herself die would only delay him, not stop him. Astrid had to stop him. But how? Here she was, lying her on the brinks of death, unable to move.

"Actually, I do have information," she said, weakly.

Drago's eyes lit. Not with hope, but with pride. "Really?"

Astrid already saw a speck flying above the mountain. She could recognize the half-black half-red tail anywhere. She smiled, which clearly made Drago suspicious.

"What?" he hissed. He looked up, but the speck was no longer there. "What did you see?"

Astrid smiled weakly. "Nothing. I was just thinking about how horrified the people of Berk would be if I really brought you there."

Drago's face brightened. "Really? You'll take me?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me the names of the people I want, and tell me the directions."

"No."

"What?" Drago snapped, raising his bullhook.

"You can't go alone," Astrid replied quickly. "I have to take you."

"Are you asking for escape?" he hissed.

"No, no! I was just telling you that if you go alone, you'll most surely die. Ever since the first attack, all of Berk is all alert for another one. If I go with you, it'll be safer. For you."

"Yes!" Drago exclaimed. "Come! Let me untie you." He used a knife to cut her free, and a stumbling and bleeding Astrid tried to stand up but a pain in her back made her unable to.

"What?" Drago hissed.

"I can't really move. It hurts." she complained as she smiled innocently. It was going perfectly. Drago was doing just as she wanted.

"Then what do you want me to do?"

Astrid shrugged. "Do you have anything I can use for support?" immediately, Drago gave her a long stick and she hobbled out of the woodpile. It wasn't a weapon, but she could use it as one.

"Come on!" Drago beckoned. But Astrid was too fast. Lifting the stick, she struck with all her remaining strength on Drago's head. Drago crumples, unconscious, but his men charge towards a panting

Astrid and hurl her back upon the woodpile. It was then Hiccup flew in, riding on Toothless, wielding Inferno, which was ablaze.

7. The Arrival

**Sorry I wasn't able to post yesterday...I was really busy.
Apologies. **

* * *

><p>Hiccup's POV<p>

Hiccup dismounted as soon as Toothless landed. Drago was an unconscious heap on the ground. Hiccup started running towards Astrid while holding Inferno, as Toothless followed. Drago's men were quick to step up but immediately backed away at the sight of a flaming sword and a growling Nightfury. As Hiccup approached what seemed to be a pile of firewood he abruptly stopped.

"Astrid..." he whispered.

Astrid was lying lifelessly upon the woodpile with enough cuts and bruises to make her nearly unrecognizable. Blood streaked her face, legs, and arms, and she looked like she was crying tears of blood as blood streamed from a cut just above the clothes were in shreds, her tunic was torn to the point that it was covering enough of her body to be the point of decency. Her eyes were closed, but she was moving. Hiccup's heart beat faster and faster, and his breathing quickened. "She's alive..."he thought. Toothless peered over Hiccup's shoulder to see what was going on, and when he saw Astrid, his large green eyes widened with worry. He nudged Hiccup with his head.

"Don't worry bud," he whispered. "We'll save her." Hiccup held Inferno even higher. Drago's men inched closer, lifting their axes and shields. Toothless growled, bearing his teeth. The guards backed away. A couple tried to approach Toothless from behind and toss a net over him, but as soon as they got close enough, Toothless would rip the net by just swinging his head and gnashing his teeth. Soon, there were what seemed like twenty ripped nets on the ground surrounding Toothless. The guards stopped trying and just slumped around. Inching closer, Hiccup held Inferno higher. Astrid blinked and her eyes opened, just barely.

"Hiccup?" She whispered. "Help."

Hiccup's eyes widened with concern. His heart continued pounding. Concern turned to anger, anger turned to fury, and Hiccup yelled a yell so fierce that even Toothless backed away.

"Who did this to her?" he screamed as sweat beaded on his cheeks. "Why did you do this? Has she done anything wrong?" Two guards ran to stop Hiccup but both fell dead as Hiccup took them down easily with Inferno. Toothless continued scowling, as if telling the group: "Don't mess with us!" Despite the "Instant Death" message Toothless and Inferno gave out, guards continued to charge, only to be killed by Inferno, or just severely injured. Soon, the number of dead or injured guard outnumbered those who were alive and well. The remaining number of Drago's henchmen were too shaken to attack by now and made no move to stop Hiccup as he approached a shaking

Astrid.

Hiccup stopped Inferno from flaming and knelt by Astrid. She reached out her hand.

"Hiccup..." she stammered. "You came...Why?"

"You need help. We are all here." he replied.

"Who?"

Hiccup smiled. "All of us. The twins, Snotlout, and Fishlegs."

Astrid squinted. "Where?"

"Waiting outside. Keeping watch. Let's go."

Astrid's tired eyes scanned the bodies of the dead guards surrounding her. "Did you...?"

Hiccup smiled. "Yes. Yes I did. Now let's go."

" I don't think I can."

"Astrid, what do you mean?" Hiccup asked, still holding her hand.

" I don't have the strength."

Hiccup started crying. " I'll carry you." He stooped down and gently rolled Astrid in his arms in order to carry her bridal style. She was heavy. As he stood up, Astrid winced in pain.

"Are you okay?"he asked. She nodded.

It was then Toothless growled. He shot a blast toward the side of the mountain, which took down a dozen of guards as well as a chunk of the wall. Hiccup immediately knelt down, shielding Astrid with his body as rocks flew everywhere. When the debris cleared. Hiccup's heart nearly stopped. Standing in front of them was none other than Drago Bludvist.

8. The Battle

****This chapter is rated T for violence.****

* * *

><p>Astrid's POV<p>

Astrid's head throbbed with pain, and her vision was still blurred. All her brain processed at that moment was that her head was pressed against Hiccup's chest and his arms were around her, and through his armor she could hear his heartbeat. She closed her eyes. If she were to die, right here, right now, she wanted to die in Hiccup's arms. She felt sweat on Hiccup's neck and heard his quavering voice, but he never loosened his grip on her.

"Hiccup," she sobbed on his chest. "I love you." She felt one of his

arms slide away from her body and reach for his sword. She looked away from his chest and looked at Drago. He had a bruise on one side of his forehead, but it just made him look more menacing.

"So?" he hissed. "This is the Dragon Master? He is your lover?" Drago chuckled. "The men of Berk have such low expectations."

Hiccup's brow furrowed. "For you information," he argued. "Astrid was the strongest in our dragon training class. She is the strongest and most beautiful girl in Berk." Astrid hit him gently in the chest. She smiled weakly at him, as if to say, "Stop. Please." She took a deep breath. Breathing was getting more and more difficult. Was this dying?

Drago kept grinning. "Oh! So come-on, lover-boy*, why not a bargain?" he asked.

Hiccup scowled. "What?"

"I can let you live and I will leave Berk alone," his scowl turned even more menacing. "As long as you let me dispose this one." He gestured to Astrid.

"No." he snapped.

"Oh really?" Drago hissed. He unsheathed a sword and pointed it at Astrid. She gasped.

Hiccup pushed the sword away with his armored arm and placed it back around Astrid. "No," he said, sharply and clearly. "If you want to harm Astrid, you'll have to kill me first."

Astrid's mind spun. 'What? No!' she thought, shaking her head. Hiccup must have felt that, so he gently stroked her hair.

"Don't worry, M'lady," he whispered. "If I only die once, I'll die with you."

"No," Astrid pleaded. "Don't. Go back. I'm going to die anyway. I'm worthless at Berk compared to you, chief." Astrid saw Hiccups eyes narrow. He was still holding on tight to her.

"Well?" Drago asked. "You're the chief of Berk! You know your choice! You must put the people's needs above yours!" he smiled. "Step aside!"

"No!" Hiccup argued, holding Astrid even tighter. "It's okay, Astrid, I'm right here," he whispered.

Astrid reached so she was touching Hiccup's face. His skin was rough, but it felt soft in her hands. "No." she whispered. "Berk needs you."

Before Hiccup, or Drago, could reply, a burning pain erupted from Astrid's chest. Clutching it, Astrid slowly pushed Hiccup away. She coughed loudly. Tears streamed down her face as she was overwhelmed with pain. Blood poured from her mouth each time she coughed. She collapsed in Hiccup's arms. "Hiccup...please." She lay gasping for air as Hiccup stared down at her in with a look of astonishment, fear, and anger. He faced Drago.

"What do you want?" he asked. "The dragons at Berk won't listen to you. Toothless is now the new alpha. Your Bewilderbeast is nothing now."

"That's right." hissed Drago. "That means I must gain control of it. He stepped towards Toothless reaching out his hand. Toothless growled and snapped his teeth. Drago's few remaining guards stating coming to aid him, but Drago forbid them to help. Astrid was still in Hiccup's arms, panting as the world blurred around her.

"Hiccup," she whispered. Drago stepped closer to Toothless, who snapped his head forward and tore a piece from of Drago's robe.

"You cursed dragon!" Drago bellowed. Toothless still started at Drago, baring his sharp teeth and gnashing at his robe.

Drago raised his bullhook. Toothless dove to one side and shot a blast towards Drago. It missed him narrowly, but it easily took down five of Drago's guards at once, leaving one remaining.

"Master!" the guard breathed, stunned at the sight of his dead commanders. "What do I do?"

Drago's eyes narrowed. "If you want honor, then help me fight!" he bellowed as Toothless tore another piece from his cape and pried the bullhook from Drago's hand with his teeth. The guard turned pale and jumped out of the hole Toothless blasted in the cave: an untimely suicide. Drago yelled in frustration. "Curse you!" he bellowed.

Hiccup watched with wide eyes as Drago battled Toothless. Toothless was hardly recognizable. His ferocity and bared teeth turned him into a different dragon: not the cute, playful, Toothless which the people of Berk knew. Hiccup then looked down at Astrid. Her eyes were halfway closed, her breathing slow. Her lips and chin were stained after she coughed up all that blood. Hiccup looked from Toothless to Astrid, not sure what to do.

"Please!" Astrid murmured as she stroked his hand. "Go help Toothless. I can fend for myself here."

"No Astrid I -"

"Go!"

Helpless and hopeless, Hiccup carefully laid Astrid down on the woodpile. She smiled. He pulled out Inferno and set it ablaze. Astrid smiled. Drago was still too busy fighting Toothless to hear. Hiccup gasped as Drago picked up his sword and pointed it at Toothless head. The dragon backed away, scared.

Hiccup cleared his throat to divert the villain's attention. "Drago Bludvist," he said confidently as he raised Inferno in one hand and reached for the axe of a fallen guard with another. He looked coldly in Drago's eye. "What are you waiting for?"

A/N: I am so sorry that I was unable to post anything for the past three days. I was very busy with family, summer homework, etc. Apologies. Also, I'm going to camp next week so I might not be able to post every day. Thank you all for reading this fic and for your understanding.. ;)

* * *

><p>Hiccup's POV<p>

Drago's laugh turned menacing as Hiccup inched closer.

"Well?" Drago laughed. "Are you going to fight or what?"

"I'll do anything for Astrid," Hiccup replied confidently.

"Even die?"

Hiccup pursed his lips and nodded. Toothless stared at him with his wide green eyes. Drago lifted his sword and pointed the tip at Hiccup's throat.

"Are you sure, O Dragon Master?" Drago teased as the tip touched Hiccup's skin.

Hiccup closed his eyes. When he opened them, he looked Drago coldly in the eye and cleared his throat.

"Go ahead," he said bravely. He extinguished Inferno and dropped the axe. Drago pierced the skin of Hiccup's neck. He felt a warm trickle of blood run down his neck and staining the collar. He winced in pain.

"You can't take the pain, can you?" teased Drago.

"I will do anything for her."

"Really?"

Toothless hissed and gestured his head forward, as if pointing at the woodpile. Hiccup tried to turn his head but it only resulted in a deeper cut with Drago's sword. He reached in his pocket and gripped tightly to Inferno.

"Oh, you want one last look, right?" Drago asked. "One last look before I kill you." He lowered the sword and sheathed it. "Go on."

Hiccup pulled out Inferno again and set it ablaze, just in case. He looked over his shoulder. Astrid was still lying motionless upon the woodpile. A small trickle of blood rolled down the edge of her lip. She looked...dead.

"I love you Astrid," he whispered. "I love you.'"

Hiccup pushed that thought away and turned to face Drago again.

What happened next was so fast it caused Hiccup's mind to blur. The second he turned to face Drago, his stomach had been inches from the point of Drago's bullhook.

"Move and I'll stab," Drago hissed.

Hiccup stood there, frozen, unable to move. His hands were shaking. He took a deep breath. He gripped Inferno tighter.

"So?" laughed Drago. "Are you too scared?"

Hiccup closed his eyes. "Go ahead," he said again. "Believe me, I've almost died about a million times. I think I know what it's like."

Drago laughed harder. "Then you get what wish for!" Hiccup hoped that Drago would do what Hiccup hoped. There was a slight chance he wouldn't - then Hiccup would die - but Hiccup had faced Drago before. He knew that Drago preferred to kill his Victims slowly and painfully rather than quick. Hiccup looked down at the bullhook as it inched closer to his stomach. Drago roared as he quickly pulled the bullhook back, preparing to finish Hiccup off in one swift forward motion. Hiccup grinned as he swung Inferno and jumped aside just as the bullhook came towards him. The flame decimated the wooden handle of the bullhook and the metal hook clattered to the kicked it aside.

"You deceived me boy! No one dares to lie to Drago Bludvist." Drago screamed as the half of the bullhook in his hand burned to ashes. Toothless then pushed Drago from behind, which caused him to stumble forward towards Hiccup and fall on his face. Toothless gave Hiccup an accomplished look and jumped on Drago, holding him down.

"Get this wretched Night Fury off me!" cursed Drago. He attempted to hit Toothless in the face, but even Drago Bludvist's punches were nothing to the Night Fury. Drago cursed again and again. Hiccup frowned. Toothless growled. Drago continued to curse.

"So?" Hiccup asked with a tone of superiority. "Got any last wishes?"

"I-" Drago began but was interrupted by a loud roar from Toothless.

"Now, Toothless," Hiccup said softly, petting him on the nose. "Let him talk for now."

Toothless narrowed his eyes as if to say, "He's evil!" But obeyed.

"I want to die in glory." Drago whispered. "You're a hero. you know."

Hiccup raised an eyebrow. "I don't know what you're trying to get at, but -"

Drago cut in: "I'm saying. No one wants to die helplessly at the hands of the enemy. I want a good fight."

Hiccup's insides tightened. A fight? Nonetheless, he cleared his throat. "Of course," he said and handed him an axe from a nearby guard. "Toothless, release him," he added.

Toothless gave Hiccup a confused look. "Go ahead, I'm fine," Hiccup cooed. "Don't worry." Toothless backed away slowly, still staring at Drago.

Drago stood up. "Such a stupid boy." He shook his head. "No one can lose a fight with me." Hiccup didn't say anything, but it was clear that Drago forgot that he lost a fight against Toothless and Hiccup that day when Toothless defeated the Bewilderbeast and became Alpha. Hiccup held Inferno in front of him, slowly backing away as Drago came closer.

'You're going to die, you know," laughed Drago. "After I kill you, I'll kill the girl. You called this fight in vain."

The mention of Astrid was too much for Hiccup. Taking a quick glance back towards her, he charged. Drago was prepared. Inferno's flame clashed with the metal axe, sending in a shower of sparks. The sparks flew everywhere, igniting weapons and dead bodies, and...the woodpile.

Hiccup screamed. "Toothless! Get Astrid!" Hiccup commanded as the flames licked closer and closer to her. Immediately, Toothless bounded towards her and tried hard to scoop her limp body onto his back. Sweat poured down Hiccup's face in both heat and worry.

"You're going to die," chuckled Drago. "Why not give up now?"

"Never," Hiccup snapped.

Drago lifted his axe again and brought it down. Hiccup ducked away and ignited the handle of fire, just like the bullhook. Drago screamed in disgust. He was weaponless.

"I'm not afraid of fire!" hissed Drago. "My cape protects me!"

Hiccup's mind spun. He tried to think of a plan. Behind him, Toothless was still trying to get Astrid on his wing and away from the blazing wood. Unsuccessful, Toothless roared with despair.

Unsure if it was anger, or his love towards Astrid and Toothless. Hiccup grabbed the axe at his feet and charged, yelling as went.

"How dare you!" he bellowed as the axe landed on Drago. He crumpled, twitched, and stopped moving.

Hiccup stepped back and studied Drago. "Dead," he whispered. He then pelted towards the woodpile.

"Toothless! Astrid!" Hiccup cried as he approached, his way getting blocked by flames. "Quick! We're leaving!" Toothless looked up with an expression full of surprise. He stumbled out of the flames and landed in front of Hiccup.

"Astrid?" Hiccup choked out after he saw that Toothless's back was bare.

Toothless lifted his wing. There she was, covered in burns and scars, unmoving.

"No!" Hiccup knelt beside her and kissed her cheek. The cave was getting hotter and hotter.

"Let's go," Hiccup commanded. He lifted Astrid on Toothless' back and mounted as well, her head resting on his lap. Toothless began to take off but growled and lowered his head. In front of them stood yet another of Drago's guards. Hiccup drew in a sharp breath. The guard looked him in the eye.

"Go!" Hiccup patted Toothless. Toothless soared up in the air. The guard seemed to toss a rope towards Toothless. "Faster!" Hiccup yelled as the rope swung closer - but not fast enough. The cave rumbled and began to cave in. The rope caught on to Astrid's ankles and pulled her down towards the collapsing cave. The guard roared with laughter as Hiccup screamed.

"Down, Toothless!" Hiccup yelled. "Quickly!"

The fellow Dragon Riders watched from the sky above with horror. Hiccup had rejected their offerings of help and made them keep watch above the cave. Toothless was too late-the rocks have already caved in. Disappointed, Toothless soared back high in the sky to join the other dragons. The fellow riders looked down in shock.

"Astrid!" Ruffnut whispered as a tear slid down her cheek.

The wind howled and the dragons' wings beat in a steady, loud rhythm. However, there was no sound loud enough, not even the roar of a dragon, that could block out Hiccup's loud, chilling, cry of utter despair.

* * *

><p>AN: Things are not always what they seem to be...There is always hope**

10. The Grieving

A/n: Sorry for the past five days. I was at an oil painting camp. Enjoy chapter 10! (Warning it may be depressing.)

* * *

><p>Hiccup's POV<p>

The clamor of the people of Berk was just what Hiccup was dreading as the riders flew in. Hiccup was hysterical as Toothless landed first out of the four dragons in the square. He refused to show his face as a crowd of worried villagers as they instantaneously crowded around the riders, mainly Hiccup.

"Where's Astrid?" a woman asked.

"Astrid?" said another.

"Are you okay?" asked a third.

"What happened?"

Hiccup's mind spun. He did not know how to tell them when to tell them, and what their reaction would be like. He just pursed his lips and looked down, his heart pounding.

"C'mon, you," he whispered to himself as tears streamed down his cheeks and he started heaving. Astrid's screams echoed in the back of his head. The sound of the collapsing cave still rung in his ears. The fellow dragon riders were still screaming their frantic cries in Hiccup's head. Drago was still cursing in his quiet but raspy voice. In fact, Hiccup's universe was crashing down. He did not care—even as chief—about what was going on around him. He was broken. Crouching on Toothless, Hiccup just gave out a muffled sob. The villagers gasped. They talked amongst themselves. Then they shouted in gasped in horror. Hiccup did not hear the rest. Quickly, he dismounted Toothless and sprinted towards the door of Haddock House and slammed the door.

Hiccup ignored the pounding on the door and the voices of the fellow dragon riders who tried to console him among the voices of the frantic villagers and worst of all, the cries of Astrid's parents, mourning over the death of their daughter. He could hear Snotlout screaming about "cheering up" and "letting go" but it was impossible. How could he ever cheer up or let go? Hiccup climbed into bed in full armor and buried his head in his furs, desperate to shut out the noise. He groaned and screamed, as the endless flood of tears that streamed from his eyes soaked up on his bed. The pounding on the door grew louder with Hiccup's sobs. He was lost, unsure what to do in this big world after his heart was just yanked out of his chest like that. First Stoick, and then Astrid? How could the gods be so cruel? For what felt like hours, Hiccup just lay in bed wondering, crying, and pleading that this was all just a nightmare and that he will wake up with Astrid beside him and all will be well.

* * *

><p>The clamor outside eventually died down and the door creaked open. Valka walked in, her head bowed. Hiccup could tell she was crying from the dark and red circles around her eyes. She walked over to Hiccup and put her arm around him and stroked his hair.<p>

"I give up," he mumbled. "I don't want to live anymore."

Valka shook her head. "Oh Hiccup," she sighed. "Don't."

"Don't what?" he snapped.

"Hiccup," Valka whispered. "Think about Astrid. She was a strong girl."

Hiccup winced at the word "was". He swallowed hard. "She wasn't just strong. She was beautiful. And no one could stand a chance against her. You just know she'll win."

Valka eyes were soft and comforting. "I know that she'll be angry if you just give up like this. You never gave up on Toothless. Or convincing Stoick. Or getting to Drago. And of course—" Valka

smiled. "You never gave up on Astrid."

Hiccup's eyes brightened ever so slightly, and he managed to smile a little. "I know. She'll be mad. She'll say that I'm such a chicken and whatnot." The smile faded and Hiccup whispered, "But I loved her."

Valka shook her head. "Not loved, Hiccup. Love. Love goes beyond death. you'll never stop loving her. Just like you and I will never stop loving Stoick." She gently brushed tears from Hiccup's face and ruffled his hair. "Don't worry. I know. It's perfectly okay to be upset. Come." She folded Hiccup in a hug.

Hiccup pressed his face against his mother's shoulders and bit his lip to keep from crying. "You cannot cry in front of your mother," Hiccup told himself. "You are twenty years old."

As a mother, Valka knew just what Hiccup was thinking about and patted him on his back. "Don't be afraid. I'm here. I'm your mother. Cry if want to."

Hiccup sighed and clutched Valka tightly. She was all he had left. If he lost her too...Hiccup pushed that thought away. Nevertheless, the thought caused a tear to stream down his cheek: the first since Valka came in. Valka kept hugging him and Hiccup started sobbing again. "Some chief," Hiccup thought to himself. "Crying your eyes out. If Stoick saw he would definitely start shouting with anger and say: 'Men don't cry! Fools do! Cheer up and get back to work!'" Hiccup couldn't help it. He just kept holding tight to his mom and let all the anger, sorrow, and confusion take over him and drown out the tears.

* * *

><p>The sun soon set and a bright orange and pink sky washed over Berk. Valka had left to go visit the Hoffersons with the other Dragonriders, but Hiccup refused to go. He felt horrible for not following and as chief, he felt he should. However, he just couldn't. He needed time alone. Toothless creeped in the open door and nudged Hiccup in the legs.<p>

"Hey bud," Hiccup whispered wearily.

Toothless looked up at him and made a face. He started licking Hiccup's leg, covering it with a thick layer of Dragon Saliva.

Hiccup tried to smile but it looked like a scowl. "You know that doesn't wash out," he groaned.

Toothless shook his head. He rested his head in Hiccup's lap and closed his eyes, as if to say "I know how you feel, I'm sorry."

Hiccup smiled a true smile and patted Toothless on the nose. "Thanks bud." He closed his eyes and rested gently against the Night Fury. Toothless seemed to be the one other than Valka to truly understand. He glanced out the tiny window in his room and trudged over to it. He studied the Hofferson's house that sat just across the square. The front window was covered in a black cloth-a symbol of death. The sun

was gone and the moon took its place in the dark sky.

* * *

><p>Hiccup's mind spun. Astrid was gone, gone forever but the world just keeps on going, The sun rises, sets, the stars rise and set, and people just go on with life. How can this be? Even worse, her body-he winced at the word-could not be retrieved. Vikings believed that the deceased will never find peace in the afterlife if the body was not properly buried and cared for. He sighed and stared out the window to the darkening sky, Valka was still away. Hiccup wondered about what the Hoffersons were feeling. He slowly sat up and trudged over to the bed and lay down. He couldn't sleep whatsoever. He sighed and groaned. What a day. Tears continued to stream down his cheeks. Can one truly run out of tears? He stared at the ceiling and looked at Toothless who was sound asleep in the corner. The dragon fought well today. If it weren't for him, Hiccup would've been killed. But now, come to think of it, Hiccup would have rather died. He would be with Astrid together. As long as they were together, Hiccup would be happy. This? This was horrible. Beyond horrible.<p>

* * *

><p>Hiccup did not know how he survived the next few minutes. He closed his eyes and drifted off in a way that was nothing like sleep. In fact, it made him even more tired. He closed his eyes and tried hard to remember Astrid. Her face, her touch, her smile all seemed to slowly fade away.<p>

"Noâ€|" Hiccup whispered and gritted his teeth. He held on to the many memories he had with her. He wanted to keep her in his memory: not just a memory of her name, but a clear image in his mind and heart. It was then the door opened and an exhausted looking Valka stepped in. Toothless woke up and looked towards the door.

"Hiccup," she said as she held up a folded paper. "I have something for you. It's from...from Astrid."

11. The Rage

A/N: So so so so sorry for the delay. I was at another week of art camp and also, I developed a writer's block for the first half of the week. School's starting soon, but I promise this fic will be finished before it does. Thank you for your understanding. Luv you all! 3

* * *

><p>Hiccup's POV<p>

Hiccup didn't sleep much that night. (Actually, he didn't sleep at all.) He was laying on his bed, clutching the piece of paper tightly in his hand. A million thoughts echoed through his head and kept bothering him since he had read that letter. He sighed in disbelief. A wave of tiredness rushed through his brain and body but somehow, it was impossible to just let sleep overcome his body. All of the previous day's events seemed to be so far away. It was impossible to imagine that all of that happened in one single day. It was just so sudden, so unexpected, so...unreal. Maybe it was just a dream, Hiccup thought. He tried kicking and pinching himself, wishing that he would

suddenly wake up and find Astrid laughing beside him, stroking his hair. But it was clear that he was already wide awake and everything that happened at Drago's cave was very real. Worst of all, she expected to die. It had been a suicide mission.

"_Dearest Hiccup,_"the letter read. "_I will more than likely be dead when you see this. I'm sorry. I just didn't want to make you worried about me. I can fend for myself easily, and don't you forget that. But your safety and for the tribe, I chose to go alone. I hope you'll understand. But knowing you, you won't. I'm so sorry that I did not tell you about what I discovered that day when I was flying Toothless for you. Hiccup, I was so scared what you might do if I told you. And I know you so well that I know that you'll want to go in my place. This time, I am not letting you._" A tear slid down Hiccup's cheek, landed on the parchment, blurring the ink. "_By the time you read this I do not know whether you obeyed me or not in this matter. Please, Hiccup, I know that you didn't want to see me go. And I never did want to leave you. I will not say that this is good for you because it truly isn't. I thought it was. I knew that Drago was still a threat and if he attacks, he'll target you. And there is nothing I want more in this world than to protect you. But as I write this, I realize that me leaving might harm you. I so sorry Hiccup. But my heart tells me to go, for your sake and the village's. I love you Hiccup. I don't want to leave you. ~Astrid."_"

Hiccup was still clutching the parchment - now tear stained and smeary- tightly in his hand. His eyelids got heavier and heavier, but he told himself to stay awake. It was almost daybreak now, and he had another day of chief's work to get started. The black sky started slowly turning a shade of blue, and the stars faded from the sky. Still more tears burned from his eyes as he slowly sat up from the bed. How could he possibly not have seen what Astrid was hiding? She _had_ been quiet for a couple of days before she left. Hiccup cursed under his breath and buried his face in his hands. What kind of boyfriend _was_ he? He knew something was wrong. Astrid was almost never as quiet as she was the days before she left. Perhaps he just thought that she was tired after taking care of two dragons since Hiccup was almost always busy. However, if he had pointed anything out, Astrid - being the "alpha" of the two of them - would have turned him down. Hiccup sighed. He chose to go along, only to go in vain. If he hadn't gone after Astrid, she would've died anyway. He groaned in frustration and slammed his hands against the side of the bed. Toothless stirred in his corner and and crept slowly towards Hiccup. Hiccup didn't notice. He yelled again and hit his bed one more time. This time, it wasn't in frustration, but anger. The truth hit Hiccup quick and hard. Before now, Hiccup had blamed Drago, the gods, and even Toothless and the other dragon riders for Astrid's death. Now, he realized that he only has himself to blame. Why was he so selfish? He shook his head as the rage bellowed from his heart and to the rest of his body. He had been so eager to save, eager to straighten things out _again_. It was just like that time with Drago. He had been so certain that he would succeed that he paid little to no attention to what might go wrong. He had been overly confident, and the horrible price had to be Astrid. He had chose to challenge Drago in a fight just to finish him off himself rather let Toothless kill him when Drago was cornered. That would've prevented the fire from happening, and...Hiccup couldn't think anymore. His head buzzed with guilt. He had been overly confident as usual. How did he not learn his lesson after the first time? The price for that had been Stoick. He buried his face in his hands and sobbed. Astrid was dead,

and he was partly responsible. Toothless crawled next to him and nudged him, but Hiccup ignored it. He stormed over to his desk and heaved a sigh. He studied the carefully drawn diagram lying on it. It was a two-person saddle. Tears were still burning his eyes. He had spent months planning on the perfect design for him and Astrid. Almost reluctantly, Hiccup brushed his finger against the thick paper and closed his eyes, deep in thought and longing. He had planned to give the saddle to Astrid as an engagement present. After all, an Viking engagement was a very complicated affair. Dowries needed to be exchanged, and there were a number of negotiations to straighten out.

Hiccup had always dreamed of marrying Astrid since...well, forever. For a long time, he had never imagined of the two of them even ending up together. As the viking he was, Hiccup thought that he would end up a bachelor forever. However, things changed and one thing led to another and Hiccup soon went from the biggest disappointment of the town to the most admired viking in probably all of Berk's history. (Hiccup didn't think so, but it was Stoick who kept saying this literally at every dinner table.) He had always looked at Astrid in a "I like you but I'll never get you" way. So when she kissed him that time at the cove, he skipped and sang his way back home. When she kissed him again that time after the Red Death, he didn't eat for two days. On the third day, he was so hungry that he ate non-stop at the mead hall for an hour through. He threw up minutes later.

Hiccup had managed to smile ever so slightly as memories flooded over him. Sadly, the smile did not last long. The memories only invoked Hiccup's guilt. He shuddered as echoes of Astrid's screams began echoing throughout his consciousness again. Driven by something beyond his control, his fingers tightened into a fist, crumpling the design. For some reason, it made him feel better. Rage caused him to tear the paper in two and hurl it at the fire. The sound the flames made sounded like a menacing laugh, as if mocking Hiccup for his failure. Hiccup watched the sides of the parchment curl up and dissolve into ash. Instead of feeling disappointed or sorry at the sight of the burned design, he felt relief. There was no more need for that anyway.

What Hiccup did next was so astonishing and unreal that even he himself was not sure why he did it. When there was nothing left of that sketch but ash and memory, Hiccup kicked his desk in rage, sending papers flying. As each design floated to the floor like giant snowflakes, Hiccup picked up each one and tore it in two. Sobbing as he did so. He did not know if he was crying for Astrid, the destroyed inventions, or his behavior. One by one, he tossed the papers into the fire. The flames leaped and crackled, devouring each like a monster devours its prey. Soon, the desk was completely clear except for Hiccup's map. Slowly, he picked it up and inched towards the fire, whose greedy arms reached towards it full of cruelty and malice.

12. Embers

A/N: So so so so so so so sorry. I'm having writer's cramp right now, and school started and I have lots of homework. :(I'll try to keep you updated...

* * *

><p>Hiccup stared at the folded up map in his hand as he inched closer to the fire. His face burned from the heat of the fire, now completely fueled and burning with an eerie glow. Heat blazed from the fireplace, but it was far from comfortable. Instead of bringing warmth and comfort, it only brought Hiccup anger and sorrow. The fire cackled with glee, as if mocking, taunting Hiccup of what he had done to end up here. He collapsed to his knees and clutched the map tightly to his chest, not sure whether to cast it away or spare it. Breathing heavily, he stretched his hand so that the corner of the map was only centimeters away from the nearest flame. The heat from the fire pierced his hands with a searing pain, but somehow the pain made Hiccup feel better. His hand burned and the flesh began turning into a blood red hue that looked more suitable for a dead body than a live human being. Sweat poured down his cheeks and ran down his arm, dampening the cover of the folded map which Hiccup was clutching so tightly, not knowing whether to just let go or leave it as one of the last physical reminders of his life with Astrid. Hiccup did not mind the pain. It was actually the agony that made Hiccup forget about what was going on around him. He forgot about his role as chief, the Dragon Riders, the village, and all his problems. He focused on the cackling flames: a symbol of death, anger, and revenge.<p>

Hiccup's heart pounded in his chest. He he stared at the map in his hand, his eyes burning with tears. The fire was dying down now, its menacing flames fading into quiet embers. Slowly he stood up and backed away from the fire pit. His arm fell to his side, and the map fell to the ground with a soft thud. He could not get himself to do it. Hiccup bent down to pick up the map, but ended up sinking to his knees. How could he possibly move on? He gently touched the leather binding, and carefully opened it. Added on pieces stretched out in all directions, some places more than others. He hadn't had time to update it much lately, which was an understatement. Itchy Armpit had been the last attachment, because Hiccup was chief and now meetings, dragon-care, and the overall well-being of the village bumped the map from number one on Hiccup's list of priorities to number two. On top of that, Hiccup would be too exhausted after completing what was number one to do anything. Normally he just collapsed on his bed and when he opened his eyes again, the sun would be just barely peeking out of the horizon and it would be the start of yet another day as chief of Berk. How was Stoick able to handle his job so well? Plus, when Stoick was chief, Berk was still constantly dealing with its "dragon problem", which made the job twice as hard and tiring. Nonetheless, Stoick made it seem as easy as riding Toothless was for Hiccup.

Hiccup sighed as he ran his finger across the various sketches and arrows on the map, some of which Astrid drew herself. Her writing reflected her personality perfectly. It was bold and tough, but at the same time, there was an element of calm and gentleness. Hiccup looked from the fire to the map, not knowing what to do. The embers were slowly dying down, leaving only the rising sun to light up the room. The floor of the fire pit was covered in a thick layer of white ash, just like the layer of thick snow that covered the village for most of the year. Hiccup drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. His eyes began to feel tight as tears welled up, refusing to fall out. However, Hiccup could not distinguish whether they were tears of sadness or tiredness. He had not slept at all throughout the night. He had tried many times, but the second he closed his eyes, he was bombarded with flashbacks from not only yesterday, but the day two

years ago: Hiccup's first meeting with Drago.

Hiccup pressed his fingers onto his eyelids. His eyes were burning and he felt as if they would collapse at any moment and never open again. His head throbbed with pain, and as he opened his eyes, the world blurred and spun around him. Was he dying right now? No, not possible. He was just tired. Tired of trying to make things normal, tired of being alone. Most of all, Hiccup was tired of trying to be someone he wasn't. He was never made to be a chief. During the endless meetings, feasts, and jobs to be done, Hiccup had longed to be outside, riding Toothless alongside Astrid and Valka as the wind rushed past his body, through his hair causing every part of him to feel open, to feel free.

Hiccup groaned and trudged to the door. It was almost morning. How was it going to be possible for him to get through the day like this? Maybe it was possible to skip his job, just for one day -but no- there was no chance. It was unthinkable for a chief to skip work for a day, even an hour. The village needed him. On top of everything, Hiccup was the son of Stoick the Vast, who was arguably the best chief Berk ever had. Hiccup had a lot to live up to. His head still throbbed as he knelt down just a couple of feet away from the door, too exhausted to reach for the doorknob. Maybe Berk can make an exception, just for today. After all, Hiccup was sick. Physically, he was fine. He was alive and well. But he was heartsick. And a sick heart is more painful than a sick body. A sick heart with a healthy body is agony.

End
file.